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UNCLAS ABU DHABI 04025

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ACTION: POL
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DISSEMINATION: POL
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FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6706
INFO RUEHV/ISLAMIC CONFERENCE COLLECTIVE
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI 4469

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 004025

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: ISLAM EXPERTS PROMOTE MODERATION, CONDEMN TERROR

11. Summary: The UAE hosted an international conference on Islam October 25-30 designed to encourage moderation in preaching and condemn extremism and terrorism. Through this conference, the UAEG hoped to clear "wrong" notions about Islam and show that Islam promotes peace and tolerance. The conference included sessions by prominent Muslim religious figures, including Sheikh Tantawi (Imam of Al Azhar Mosque in Cairo) and Sheikh Hamza Yousef (founder of Al-Zaytuna Institute in Hayward, California), Dr. Issam Al Bashir (Sudan), Sheikh Al Habib Ali Al Jafri (Yemen), Dr. Fahmi Howaidi (Egypt), and Sheikh Nouh Al Qudah, Advisor to the UAE Minister of Justice, Islamic Affairs and Awqaf. The conference ended with a call for moderate Islamic preaching, increased training of Imams, and reforms of the Islamic studies curriculum. End Summary.

ISLAMIC PREACHING AND TEACHING

12. Conference speakers discussed how preachers, scholars, professors, and teachers should convey Islamic teachings to the faithful in the mosques and to students in the schools. Speakers urged those with preaching and teaching responsibilities to use a unified, balanced, and moderate Islamic message to encourage dialogue among civilizations. They also encouraged scholars and preachers to spread religious awareness and a "correct" Islamic foundation among Muslim youth, who might misinterpret the teachings of Islam. One Imam said that Islamic teachings and sermons should be wise and connected to the roots of Islam, but they should also be relevant to the current culture and language. Another acknowledged that the region needs to reform its educational and Islamic studies curricula, but stressed that this should not be imposed from outside.

Dangers of extremism

13. Scholars at the conference declared that extremism is "un-Islamic" and should be condemned. They stated that the acts of

some persons, who are either enemies of, or are ignorant of, Islam, do not represent the Islamic nation or the teachings of Islam, and stressed that the issue of associating Islam with terrorism should be addressed by the Islamic world through government institutions, the educational system, and all sectors of society.

¶4. In a separate meeting with the conference speakers, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, Crown Prince of Dubai and UAE Minister of Defense, urged them to spread the "true nature" of Islam, and to correct distortions about the religion. One conference scholar said that the West cannot be blamed for the distorted image of Islam when real responsibility for the distortion lies with certain groups that have an extreme attitude toward Islam.

¶5. UAE PRESIDENT SHEIKH KHALIFA BIN ZAYED, TOLD THE LOCAL PRESS THAT HIS COUNTRY REJECTS VIOLENCE AND EXTREME VIEWS THAT SMEAR THE IMAGE OF ISLAM. SHEIKHA FATIMA BINT MUBARAK, WIDOW OF LATE PRESIDENT ZAYED, ISSUED A STATEMENT DURING THE CONFERENCE SAYING SHE HOPED THE CONFERENCE WOULD YIELD CONSTRUCTIVE RECOMMENDATIONS THAT WOULD HELP "SAVE THE MUSLIM NATION FROM THE CURRENT CRISIS."

Conference recommendations

¶6. The conference ended with the following recommendations:

- need for moderation in preaching;
- need to adapt to changes in the modern world;
- refrain from using religion for political purposes;
- work to correct distortions of Islam as being in any way related to extremism and terrorism.

¶7. The conference called on the ministries of justice in Muslim countries to develop Friday sermons compatible with contemporary realities, and to train their imams on how best to spread the correct message of Islam and how to address the media. The conference also called on all the ministries of education to review their national curricula, conduct field studies on the realities of teaching Islamic studies in the modern world, and evaluate Islamic Studies teachers to ensure they are correctly portraying the image of Islam. The UAE Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs and Awqaf announced that a similar conference will be held annually.

¶8. Several senior members of the UAE ruling family attended the sessions, including Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, de facto Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed, and Information and Culture Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed. U.S. Embassy staff attended many of the proceedings.

Comment:

¶9. The conference provided an important platform for the UAE Government to speak publicly about its opposition to terrorism and extremism. Hosting such a timely conference carries a message that the UAE encourages all Arab and Muslim nations to maintain a dialogue with the West. It is an acknowledgment on the part of the UAE and other Muslim countries that misconceptions and misinterpretations of Islam do exist and that it is the Muslim world's responsibility to correct these distortions that extremists exploit.

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